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The Hypocrisy of Democracy

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The signing of the Dayton Accords should have provided the majority of the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the hoped-for return of prewar values. The Dayton Accords ended the bloody war in Bosnia and Herzegovina: this was without a doubt its only contribution. But those same people who started the war and conducted it were also the Dayton Accords signatories. When we see today who is fighting to keep every letter of the Dayton Accords in place, it is clear that the Dayton Accords was put together along lines dictated by nationalist leaders whose wartime conquests it confirmed.

A state, Bosnia and Herzegovina, was created which has not been able to function properly for ten full years, for the simple reason that the Dayton Accords left all the nationalist parties in power. Only a few politicians whose names are in the public indictments of the Hague Tribunal have been forced out of public life. What else can one expect from those who called for ethnic cleansing during the war, other than to entrench their own positions? How do they go about this? By intimidating their followers with election slogans such as: “Take our side or be wiped out!” In other words, if you do not vote for us (the nationalist party), the other side (the non-nationalists) will spark a new war and you will disappear in it.

One of the illustrations of the hypocrisy of the international community is that Biljana Plavšić was the legal president of Republika Srpska almost two years after the signing of the Dayton Accords. In view of the fact that Biljana Plavšić, in the course of the war and on numerous occasions, had publicly—in the media and before foreign TV cameras—explained that Moslems were genetically degenerate Serbs––whose genes had degenerated when they converted from Christianity to Islam and who therefore needed to be annihilated so that the Serbian nation might remain pure—what else except the hypocrisy of democracy could explain the decision of the international community to have her replace Radovan Karadzic, who had been indicted by the Hague Tribunal?

This raises a historically comparative question: How would Europe have developed if the allies, after the Second World War, had left the National Socialist Party and the majority of Hitler’s collaborators in power? Under such conditions, what would have been the results of elections in the first ten years? In Germany the first elections were held four years after the end of the Second World War. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the

international community introduced democracy under impossible circumstances, each year organizing elections in which the nationalists won, by a striking minority of the electorate, while the passive, depressed and uninterested majority–as its usual answer to the question why they did not vote—explained that no matter what, the international community would decide everything.

At the same time, the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, drawn up according to the Dayton Accords, in its preamble defines the country as segregationist, in that it does not affirm citizenship but rather membership in one of the three major ethno-national groups. Thanks to such a constitution and the constellation of power, the country has been divided for ten years along national lines, which completely suits the nationalists in power who did not succeed in dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war but have managed to do so through the Dayton Accords.

While I am writing these lines, there is being held in Geneva a conference on Bosnia and Herzegovina Ten Years after the Dayton Accords. It is organized by the NGO "Bosnia 2005", founded by Wolfgang Petrich, former High Representative of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina! With all due respect to the participants in this Conference and their efforts to find a solution to the unnecessary accumulation of problems in this country, I must express my amazement that a person who was appointed the High Representative of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina under unfavorable conditions that were known to everybody, should choose—after the expiration of his term of office—to act in the non-governmental sector trying to solve problems he could not or would not solve as a politician.

It is said that people of the non-governmental sector are those who stick their heads through walls so that politicians may pass through the hole afterwards. If so, then the decision of a politician and representative of the international community to seek in the non-governmental sector the solutions he could not find in the political sector demands analysis. Does this mean that this same international community, over a ten-year period, prevented positive changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina by paralyzing the politicians whom they placed in the office of High Representative? Does it mean that they chose exactly those people who could not perceive what the basic problems of Bosnia Herzegovina's society were?

While answering this question, one should not overlook the significant fact that Wolfgang Petrich is recognized among thoughtful circles in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a man who made more positive moves than his predecessors or his successors. Is it a question of the hypocrisy of democracy? Is Bosnia Herzegovina simply a proving ground for research by the international community into: whether one can teach democracy under unfavorable circumstances; how one can successfully plant, nourish, and develop nationalism when it is maintained by constitutional regulations; how it is possible to successfully excommunicate a state from the community of democratic nations while at the same time calling on it to develop democratic consciousness; and how long can such a paralyzed state survive?

Some politicians during the Second World War in Bosnia and Herzegovina decided that the state which they were freeing from Nazi Occupation would be a state of equality in which all citizens would have equal rights. These decisions were reflected

in the constitution of the state which they freed. But they were the victors and were able to do this. The victors in the War of 1992-1995 were obviously nationalists, who began the war, created it, and waged it; it is no surprise that there is a segregational clause in the preamble to the Dayton Accords.

The Dayton Accords did not spell out two of the most important determinants: First, was Bosnia and Herzegovina a secular state? Second, What was to be its socio-political organization? It omitted that which other states pride themselves on; since it is not possible that this happened accidentally, the question arises: Who needed this and why? Those who manipulate religions and frightened people know, best of all, why this omission was necessary to them, and those elements of the international community who supported them in that omission will have to answer to this. This catastrophic omission is itself inadequately explained as the hypocrisy of democracy.

Isn't it the hypocrisy of democracy that participants in the war who were soldiers and officers of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which defended Bosnia Herzegovina, as a result of the Dayton Accords are forced to the sidelines and cannot be elected or fill any state function, while those who blessed them, religious personages, continue to fulfill their functions, and even promote their activity through the formation of commissions, inter-religious councils, and through participation in international conferences—all of which raises the question : Where are the churches going and what is their mission ? At the same time, all tolerant religious officials in the Balkans are qualified as "red," while those who are fundamentalistically inclined are called "white" and "brilliant." Is not such an attitude of the international community toward the religions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region more proof of the hypocrisy of democracy?

In such a political and psychological climate one cannot logically expect the initiation of the required process of de-Nazification, a process which is essential in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such a process first requires facing up to the truth, with a full awareness of what it was that happened during those horrible wars. Millions of people living in Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia and B&H, for instance, are not prepared––even today––to face what was done in the name of their nation. So many in those communities turn their heads away from the truth, out of fear of the inescapable question they must ask themselves: "What did I do to stop this from happening?" and the even more wrenching question, "Am I–at least in part–morally responsible by voting for these politicians?"

There is a strange cloud of collective guilt hanging over entire ethnic communities because those who committed war crimes have still not been arrested, ten years after the war ended. There is sad and bitter irony in the fact that Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić are still at large today, though they were indicted years ago by the Hague Tribunal for genocide and other crimes against humanity. It is possible to imagine how the hundreds of thousands of survivors of war crimes, and the more than a million family members of those murdered in Bosnia and Herzegovina feel, when they watch how, right after the war, 80.000 soldiers, and ten years after the war, 10,000 SFOR soldiers fail to arrest a man responsible for the deaths of more than two hundred thousand innocent people.

Only when criminals are brought to face justice will victims be able to breathe more freely. This will also disperse the cloud of collective guilt from whole communities, and only then will people be able to turn to the victims of the war and say the long-awaited sentence: “I know that what happened was terrible. And I know that it must never happen again.” Today, ten years after the war, the maniac ideas of criminals with bloody hands about ethnically pure regions continue to give rise to murders. Even the children of minority returnees are murdered in order to intimidate them into giving up their plan to return. The police claim they “cannot find” the killers who continue to remain at large. The political elites responsible for this situation created a country rife with crime and corruption from top to bottom, throughout the economy, judiciary, educational system, the health care system and the highest political echelons.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has had to pass through three transitions in this condition: the first was the building of institutions and a stable peace; the second was the transition of property ownership from socialist to private; and the third was the transition from dependence on the international community to self-reliance.

The transition in property ownership, known as privatization, has sadly meant the stripping of so much assets as to amount to the destruction of the entire economy, which had already been hit hard by the war. The directors of enterprises, firms and factories first ran down everything so that they could acquire it for less. This has resulted in social poverty and millions of unemployed. Unemployment in Bosnia is at 40%, with 60% of the population living on 25 cents a day, while the United Nations standard set $4.00 as the poverty line. I wonder what one should call life that goes on at an income of one sixteenth of poverty?

Such extreme forms of poverty give rise to all manner of crimes, from drug sales, to trade in people and prostitution. The judiciary, which should censure such activities, is inefficient, unprofessional, politically dependent, and financially corrupt. The sad consequence of this condition is a surge in the number of illiterate children, who spend their time on the streets begging or in prostitution in order to feed their unemployed, ailing or invalid parents, instead of being in school. War profiteers, whose wealth, based on bestial looting of victims, are now prominent citizens and businessmen, while the surviving victims, witness to the source of the wealth these men enjoy, are often beggars today. Retired people who, while they were still working before the war, owned not only their own apartments but also vacation homes on the seaside or in the mountains, are left today with nothing but an average pension, little more than $2.00 per day, which is half of what is considered poverty-level subsistence. Everyday in Bosnia and Herzegovina this last few years we have seen children begging, and the elderly, their faces showing what they’ve been through, many of them holding university degrees, rummaging through garbage cans in hopes of coming up with something edible. Add to that the long lines in front of embassies of the developed countries, lines in which all the youngest, most talented and most educated people stand waiting for papers to emigrate, and add the significant percentage of suicides, and you’ll have a good sense of the immensity of this catastrophe.

There is now a ridiculous insistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the differences among the various ethnic groups. This has gone so far that it has intruded on the

education system. Children are often divided in the elementary and secondary schools by the ethnic membership of their parents into separate classrooms, and there are schools where the teachers, swayed by fascist ideas, have raised wire fences five to six feet tall in the middle of playgrounds so that there can be no physical contact between the various groups of school children during recess. No one asks thousands of the parents, those who are in mixed marriages, how they feel about this madness.

This catastrophic situation demonstrates how all elements of society have been destroyed, based on the loss of moral and ethical norms. Their own ethnic communities often consider those whose names are on the lists of inductees for The Hague heroes. Some even call them 'living saints'.

The wars in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, were the first serious crisis of the post-cold-war period. The lack of adequate and timely policies throughout this period has shed light on a far more serious problem: the total helplessness of international participants to recognize the new nature of this kind of crisis, its causes and consequences. This confirms that the existing system of international security and the key international organizations, which have developed in the post-colonial, bipolar world, do not fit conceptually within the process of globalization and a multi-polar world. The international players have not been learning on their job.

The essential message is that the crisis in individual countries cannot be permanently resolved within the framework of these countries, because the causes and consequences are of a larger, regional character. The mistakes we have seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have to be repeated elsewhere. The lessons learnt there can be applied not only in southeastern Europe, but in the necessary transformations of international organizations as well.

At the end of this year, the fourth High Representative of the international community, who has almost unlimited powers according to the Dayton Accords, will leave Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ten-year anniversaries are always a good time to draw the line and make an accounting. I don't know how they will be do an accounting of their own, but I do know that all the problems on the terrain of Bosnia Herzegovina remain open and unsolved, awaiting better and more effective solutions.

But Bosnia and Herzegovina is not the only state in which representatives of the international community have shown their inefficiency. Their repetition of the same or similar mistakes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Chechnya today, or who knows in what countries tomorrow, opens a serious question: is it possible that the international community learns slowly or that a state of permanent instability in these countries is in fact its express goal?

The simplified way that conflicts between ethnic groups are portrayed comes down to a blackand-white stereotype. Black and white are not, in fact, colors, and the lives of the inhabitants of countries at war, during the mandates of leaders who foster evil ideas, are expressed in a palette of nuanced hues. Perception of these shades hinges on individual motivation, our unwillingness to tolerate evil or the shallow stereotypes offered by theoreticians who invariably miss the truth in their attempt to formulate

generalizations.

Those inclined to explain inter-ethnic conflict as a clash of civilizations are not taking into account the centuries that these same groups have lived in mutual understanding with respect for one another's differences. As a rule, mini-nationalisms become an instrument in the hands of the ruling elite, who are followed by a minority of the larger population, albeit a minority armed with powerful weapons. Knowing that they would be swiftly replaced or even jailed were they to allow the development of civil society and open elections, these rulers use all available means, the most powerful being the media, to frighten the members of their own ethnic groups. The scenario is always the same: they claim that members of one or all of the other ethnic groups threaten their vital interests by their very existence. All they need is a critical mass of fear, rather than hatred, for them to be able to continue manipulating the passions of war, to justify the necessity of prolonging the mindset of war and the war itself.

Putting aside the members of the international community and their lack of will to help in finding a truly viable solution, we have to ask ourselves and especially our young people why, ten years after the war and thanks to those who are in power, we still find ourselves buried in the trenches of prejudice because of our leaders' need to keep us apart. How can we turn this negative energy against those who have been producing it systematically over the past fifteen years? What would happen if we did that? Would it be a revolution or an evolution or both? How do you feel when you look at yourselves in the mirror? Do you feel better after you have insulted somebody and shown how much impatience and intolerance you bear within yourself? Are you any richer or wiser after that? Do you take pleasure in another's suffering, humiliation, or fear? Young Afghan men under the age of twenty do not know what it is to live peacefully. War is their model, because they were born during wartime. Do you really want your children to know nothing else but negative feelings––to withdraw and live outside the real world, to be isolated, and to believe that they are superior to other human beings? The war of feelings can be equally destructive or even more destructive than the war with weapons. How much longer will you be the mute follower of great manipulators who have no credibility concerning the direction they are leading you because everything they do has only their own profit in mind. Who will be your friends in a world that has 6000 ethnic groups, when you believe that only the members of your group are good and all others are evil or worthless? Do you know that there is no life in your small ethno-national enclaves? How much longer will you allow the hypocritical democracy of nationalistic parties, who all have the word "democracy" in their names, to paralyze your life just as the hypocritical democracy of the international community, whatever it means, has been doing with them?

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